

Missouri State Rehabilitation Council For the Blind

Annual Report 2006



October 1, 2005 – September 30, 2006

Letter from the Chairman of the State Rehabilitation Council

December 15, 2006

Dear Friends:

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), created by Executive Order 93-01, is responsible for reviewing, analyzing and advising Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (RSB), an agency in the Missouri Division of Family Support (DFS), on its policies and provision of rehabilitation services to Missourians who are blind or visually impaired.

As Chair of the SRC, it is my honor to submit the 2006 Annual Report on the status of these services, in accordance with Section 105(5) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Congress in 1998. During the period of this report, the Council has worked cooperatively in many areas of interest with RSB to improve the range, scope and quality of services for the blind and visually impaired. Our quarterly reviews of agency policies, procedures and operations, along with the public forums held in conjunction with our meetings and our "customer satisfaction survey," have given consumers a very important source of input into the rehabilitation process for Missourians who are blind or visually impaired.

The SRC is dedicated to working with RSB to help blind and visually impaired persons to become self-supporting and fully participating members of our society.

We feel this report provides an informative overview of RSB and the activities of the SRC. We would be pleased to answer any questions about this report, the operations of RSB, or the work of the State Rehabilitation Council.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Lawrence Luck
Chairman
State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind**

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Acronym List

BEP – Business Enterprise Program

BEST – Blindness Education, Screening and Treatment Program

CAP – Corrective Action Plan

DESE – Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

FFY – Federal Fiscal Year

FY – Fiscal Year

FSD – Family Support Division

IPE – Individualized Plan for Employment

ITSD – Information Technology Services Division

PIP – Program Improvement Plan

POB – Prevention of Blindness

RCEP – Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program

RSA – Rehabilitation Services Administration

RSB – Rehabilitation Services for the Blind

RT – Rehabilitation Teacher

SRC – State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

VR – Vocational Rehabilitation

VRC – Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

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SECTION I

Services Provided by RSB

Missouri citizens who are blind and visually impaired work with a rehabilitation team to develop an employment goal and achieve success in employment. This team includes a rehabilitation counselor, and might include a rehabilitation teacher and/or mobility specialist. The role of the Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (RSB) rehabilitation team is to assist in assessing interest and abilities so a suitable vocational goal can be selected.

Vocational rehabilitation services may include:

- Diagnosis and evaluation
- Physical restoration
- Vocational training, including college
- Continuing education
- Tools and equipment
- Adaptive technology
- Job development
- Job placement
- Post-employment services
- Supported employment
- Instruction in daily living skills, including Braille and travel training
- Community-based rehabilitation services for adjustment to blindness and attainment of alternative skills

SECTION II

MATTERS PRESENTED TO THE COUNCIL

Consumer Satisfaction Surveys

Consumer Satisfaction Surveys are sent to all customers of RSB when their cases are closed. At the November 2005 SRC meeting the results of the first Consumer Satisfaction Survey were discussed. A committee was selected to further refine the survey questions to clarify the information that was being obtained. Students from the University of Missouri-St. Louis also reviewed the survey and the suggestions were used to update the current survey. At the August 2006 SRC meeting the Council agreed that the consumer satisfaction surveys will be sent to individuals who have been served by RSB on a quarterly basis. Consumer satisfaction survey will be reviewed by the SRC and a summary of that review will be posted on the website at <http://www.dss.mo.gov/fsd/rsb/srcb.htm>

Public Fora

The SRC has continued to hold public fora throughout the state which allows individuals who are receiving services from RSB to come and voice their praise and or concerns about the services they have received. This year the Council held public fora in Cape Girardeau (November 2005), Columbia (February 2006), Jefferson City (May 2006), and St Joseph (August 2006).

St. Louis Office Consolidation:

At the November 2005 SRC meeting, the Council was informed that RSB was planning to consolidate the two district offices in the St. Louis area into a single location at 9900 Page Avenue. This move was the result of a state initiative to move all agencies out of leased space and into state-owned buildings. Both St. Louis district offices are housed in leased buildings. RSB held preliminary meetings with Office of Administration officials about design of the new office, and with transportation officials regarding issues involving access to the building by public transportation.

At the February 2006 SRC meeting, RSB reported that there were problems with access to the 9900 Page Avenue location for consumers and staff, and that no move into that building would occur until the problems had been resolved. At the May 2006 SRC meeting, RSB announced that the two offices would not be consolidating at the Page Avenue location. The transportation issues were addressed and the St. Louis-North district office would be moving to that location once the renovation was completed; due to a lack of space the St. Louis-South district office would remain in its current location. The St. Louis-North office moved into the Page Avenue location in September 2006.

Study on Services for Students Who are Blind or Visually Impaired in Missouri.

At the November 2005 SRC meeting the Council was informed of a study that was commissioned by the Department of Elementary

and Secondary Education on Services for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired in Missouri. The findings of the study recommended that a structured process be undertaken to develop a shared vision amongst all agencies to support quality education for blind and visually impaired children and that a review of personnel preparation is needed in Missouri to appropriately respond to the personnel needs of local school districts.

The study also suggested that the Missouri School for the Blind be reviewed to ensure:

- Continued availability of strong residential and educational programs
- Curriculum is aligned with the Grade Level Expectations developed by DESE
- Redefine and expand Outreach Services
- Coordinate and facilitate a comprehensive program of personnel development
- Coordinate the establishment of a statewide social support network
- Coordinate the development of regional and statewide parent training and support networks

State Audit of RSB:

The State Auditor conducted an audit of RSB's Vocational Rehabilitation program which resulted in a final report released in December 2005. At the February 2006 SRC meeting, RSB reported the final results of the audit, along with RSB's responses to the audit findings. The largest findings related to the management of the Social Security Reimbursement program, and

RSB's use of those funds. RSB has made changes in the way the SSA reimbursements are tracked, submitted and handled upon their receipt. All of the other findings of the audit have been addressed by RSB, and many in fact had been corrected prior to the audit taking place. A copy of the full audit report is available at: <http://auditor.mo.gov/press/2005-93.pdf>

Employment Database

At the February 2006 SRC meeting RSB discussed forming networks with employers on a state and national level who are willing to hire blind individuals. RSB has created an electronic database to be used by rehabilitation counselors which consists of employers who are willing to hire blind individuals. This database provides the rehabilitation counselors with employer contacts. All of the counselors have access to the database. RSB is trying to expand this network to also include multi-state employers as well.

Council Member Training

Staff from the Rehabilitation Continuing Education Project (RCEP) Region 7 at the University of Missouri-Columbia provided training for the SRC members at the May 2006 SRC meeting. Four training modules were presented to the SRC: History of Vocational Rehabilitation, An Overview of the Rehabilitation Act, Principles and Policies of Vocational Rehabilitation, and The Role of the State Rehabilitation Council. The website for RCEP Region 7 is: <http://www.rcep7.org> and the documents for this presentation are listed under the "Previous Conferences Archive" heading, titled "2005 SRC Training Forum."

Liaison Position

The prior SRC liaison is no longer in the position. An attempt to fill the contract position is underway and as of the end of this report period a liaison has not been selected.

The liaison is responsible for scheduling meetings, assisting various committees, arranging for conference calls, conducting the consumer satisfaction survey, keeping abreast of legislative activities, producing the annual report of the SRC, and other duties.

RSA Monitoring

During FFY 2005 RSA performed a monitoring of RSB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. As a result of that monitoring, RSA has required RSB to develop a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) to address the findings of the monitoring, along with a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address RSB's failure to pass the Standards and Indicators. RSB presented the CAP and PIP to the SRC at the May 2006 meeting, and asked the SRC to assist in a plan of work to resolve the policy-related issues expressed in the findings.

RSB asked the SRC to take part in resolving the following issues:

1. The requirement that RSB develop a cooperative agreement with all Institutions of Higher Education in the state

2. The development of criteria for the definition of "significant disability" and policy for operation of an Order of Selection
3. The development of more detailed definitions of the nature and scope of VR services.

The SRC provided RSB with contacts and information to assist in satisfying the first issue above (the cooperative agreements) and appointed a committee to assist in the development of the definitions and policies in the second and third issues. The SRC was briefed on the results of the committee's work at the August 2006 meeting, and voted to adopt the definition of significant disability, the Order of Selection and the nature and scope of VR services as proposed by the committee. These changes were included in Version 1.3 of the VR Policy and Procedure Manual, located at:

<http://www.dss.mo.gov/fsd/rsb/manual/vrman/index.htm>

Recycled Computers

At the August 2006 SRC meeting RSB informed the Council of a new program that was developed between RSB and the Information Technology Services Division (ITSD) within the Department of Social Services to use recycled computers for some RSB consumers. The Department of Social Services replaces all of its computers every 18 months. Under the Recycled Computers program ITSD will format these computers, which are very up to date as far as operating systems and speed are concerned, and install software as requested by RSB for the individual consumer.

It is envisioned that these computers will be very useful for high school students who are in transition plans, or for a first-time computer user to learn keyboarding and other computer skills. The computers could also be useful in a college student's plan, knowing that over the period of the college program the computer will likely have to be replaced before the student is placed in employment. The initial group of 40 computers will be prepared by ITSD and can be requested by authorization of RSB counselors for their consumers.

BEST Program

During FY 2006, two SRC members (Clay Berry and Lawrence Luck) took part in the committee formed to explore the creation of an agreement to utilize funds from the Blindness Education, Screening and Treatment Program (BEST) to expand the service offerings of the Prevention of Blindness (POB) Program and to provide a resource for producing educational materials aimed at preserving and restoring vision. In July 2006, an agreement was signed between the Department of Health and Senior Services and the Family Support Division/RSB to provide funding from the BEST program for those services. As a result of this agreement, RSB will expand the availability of POB services to St. Louis City and Jackson County (where no POB services have been available), increase the financial eligibility to 100% of federal poverty level for a single person, and develop materials that will be used to promote vision care, restoration and rehabilitation throughout the state. It is expected that these services will begin during the 1st quarter of FY 2007.

Student Connections

RSB held Student Connections '06 in August in Kansas City. Student Connections is an annual statewide conference whose purpose is to assist blind and visually impaired students from throughout the state in succeeding in higher education. This conference brought together 55 RSB-sponsored high school and college students for a weekend of fun and learning activities to prepare them for the upcoming academic year. High school students were strongly encouraged to interact with their college counterparts to obtain information and to network with students at the colleges they might attend. A variety of sessions were offered by RSB staff and experts from the academic world to help these students succeed in their education, employment and life. These included presentations on: balancing the social and academic lives, marketing yourself to a prospective employer, how to survive when your technology lets you down, advocacy and how to adjust to college life.

Besides the presentations, Student Connections is best known for the opportunity it provides for students to make 'connections' with other blind and visually impaired students; the information shared between the students is often as valuable as that provided by the formal presentations. In many cases this contact is the first a student has ever had with another blind or visually impaired student.

Strategic Plan

RSB is currently developing and preparing a Strategic Plan as a guide to the future of the agency. Input on the plan has been

received from consumers, the SRC, Consumer Groups, Blind Vendors and the general public.

This plan will be a fluid document based on one, three and five year goals.

Section III

Status Chart:

Status 00: Referral

Status 02: Applicant

Status 06: Extended Evaluation

Status 08: Closure from 00, 02, 06

Status 10: IPE development

Status 12: IPE completed

Status 14: Counseling and Guidance Only

Status 16: Physical and Mental Restoration

Status 18: Training

Status 20: Ready for employment

Status 22: In Employment

Status 24: Service interrupted

Status 26: Closed, rehabilitated

Status 28: Closed, after IPE initiated

Status 30: Closed, before IPE initiated

Status 32: Post-employment services

Status 33: Closed, employment maintained

Status 35: Closed, reopen in 00

Statistical Analysis of RSB Operations

RSB is the designated state unit described in the Vocational Rehabilitation Act as Amended in 1998 for persons with visual disabilities in the State of Missouri. RSB is a section of and reports to the Family Support Division, part of the Department of Social Services. RSB has a total of 117 full time equivalent staff

positions (FTEs) in FY 2006; there were 114 in FFY 2005. The following numbers of staff are included in the FTE count:

- 17 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs)
- 17 Rehabilitation Teachers (RTs)
- 17 Rehabilitation Assistants
- 6 Orientation and Mobility Specialists
- 7 District Supervisors
- 7 Clerical Supervisors
- 4 Children's Specialists
- 5 Business Enterprise Area Supervisors
- 1 Employment Specialist

There are 26 administrative and management staff in various positions at the central office in Jefferson City.

Approximately 10 FTEs are used to provide reader and driver accommodation to staff with disabilities.

All of the positions named above are directly involved in providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities.

Open Cases

There were 1025 open cases in FFY 2006 as compared to 1001 in FFY 2005.

Applications

In order to receive vocational rehabilitation services, each consumer must complete an application and undergo eligibility

consideration. When an application has been signed, a consumer is considered as being in “02” status. The group that consists of all consumers who apply during a given year is considered to be a good measuring stick against which to compare other case actions, such as successful closures, in order to determine if there are anomalies which affect certain population groups such as women and ethnic minorities.

During FFY 2006, a total of 548 persons applied for vocational rehabilitation services; there were 533 in FFY 2005. 282 applicants were male and 266 applicants were female. The youngest applicant was 15 years old and the oldest applicant was 88 years old. The average age of applicants is currently 42; in FFY 2005, it was 38. From application status, cases are moved to either “06 Status” (extended evaluation), “08 Status” (closed before eligibility is established) or “Status 10” (Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)).

Closure Types

RSB categorizes closed cases based on whether or not services have led to employment. In considering whether or not a case has been successful, the type of employment is considered.

Employment of consumers in competitive work (work in an integrated environment which pays at least minimum wage) self-employment or the Business Enterprise Program is considered as targeted employment; or the employment that Rehabilitation Services Administration considers as appropriate for determining an agency’s success or failure. Additionally, there is one other category, which is considered (during this Fiscal Year), as successful closures, but not as targeted closures – employment as a

homemaker. Each of these is considered successful employment closure; however, the most weight is accorded to closures of the targeted group. All closures which result in employment are referred to as “Status 26” closures.

Employment Closures

Successful Closures

RSB successfully closed 246 cases with consumers who achieved their employment goals during FFY 2006. Included in this total are 186 competitive employment closures, (190 in FFY 2005), 20 homemakers, (10 in FFY 2005), 33 who achieved self-employment, (31 in FFY 2005) and 5 who found employment through the Business Enterprise Program (9 in FFY 2005). Total employment success has improved when compared to FFY 2005, when there were 242 closures.

Of the 246 closures, 67 (27%) moved from unemployment at the time of application to employment at the time of closure; this is less than FFY 2005 (93 or 38.2%) In all, approximately 161 (or 64.9%) of RSB’s closures either resulted in new or more lucrative employment for the consumer. The remaining 35.1% of closures were cases where vocational rehabilitation services made it possible for the consumer to retain the job they had at the time of application. The average age of consumers who achieved employment as a result of RSB services is 45; the youngest was 16 and the oldest was 86 years old. 181 of the 246 closures were Caucasian, 61 were Black or African-American, 1 was American Indian or Alaska Native, 2 were Asian and 1 was Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

Cost of Employment Closures

In achieving the successful employment closure described above, RSB expended \$3,044,020 during FFY 2006 (\$2,840,320 in FFY 2005). This equates to an average cost of \$12,374 per case (\$11,737 in FFY 2005). The lowest cost for a successful employment case was \$0 (the same as in FFY 2005) and the highest cost was \$113,219 (\$106,328 in FFY 2005).

Income from Employment Closures

The 246 paid employment closures achieved by RSB consumers during FFY 2006 resulted in weekly earnings of approximately \$94,937 (or an average of \$385 per week). On an annual basis this group would earn \$4,936,724. If a tax rate of 20% existed, this group of consumers would repay the cost of their rehabilitation (\$3,044,020) in just over 3 years.

This example of rehabilitation paying for itself does not consider the substantially greater cost savings that result from the decrease in the cost of benefits such as Social Security, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, etc. It is projected that approximately 106 consumers will meet Substantial Gainful Activity status as a result of their new earnings; in FFY 2005 the number was 76.

Homemakers

20 consumers achieved employment as homemakers in FFY 2006; there were 10 in FFY 2005. The youngest consumer was 29 years old (21 in FFY 2005) and the oldest consumer was 76 years old

(74 in FFY 2005). The average age of Homemaker consumers was 47 years old (same as FFY 2005).

RSB spent \$105,242 on 20 homemaker closures during FFY 2006. There were 2 male consumers and 17 female consumers. Of the 20 cases, 13 were Caucasian and 7 were minorities.

Post Employment

Once the consumer has been employed for a minimum of 90 days, and all services required by the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) have been delivered, the case can be successfully closed. However, many cases require services of an ongoing nature to retain employment or adjust to new employment. For those cases, RSB can reopen the case for “Post Employment Services”. Under Post Employment Services, RSB can provide for service needs which are discovered after employment has begun, or that arise as employment continues. These services are limited to those which can be provided under the existing IPE. If the employment cannot be maintained and a new IPE is necessary, the case must be closed and a new case opened.

In FFY 2006, 53 cases were opened for post employment services. All 53 cases were closed as having successfully retained employment.

Non-Employment Closures

Cases Closed Prior to Eligibility

Status 08 closures occur when consumers apply for services but their cases are closed prior to their achieving eligibility. During FFY 2006, 85 cases were closed in this status (74 in FFY 2005).

Cases Closed After Individualized Plan for Employment Initiated

Status 28 closures are those cases which are closed after Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) services have been delivered, but in which employment was not achieved. These cases are of particular interest to the SRC because they often occur after the expenditure of significant resources. In FFY 2006 RSB recorded 69 Status 28 closures. In FFY 2006 RSB spent \$795,918 on these case closures.

Administrative Reviews/Mediations/Hearings Conducted

There were 2 requests for hearings during FFY 2006; both consumers withdrew their request prior to the selection of a hearing officer. No mediations were requested.

Continued Vision for the Future

The SRC continues to work cooperatively with RSB to improve the services offered to meet what we consider to be the unique rehabilitation needs of consumers with visual disabilities. We believe in the abilities of persons who are blind and visually

impaired. Finally, the SRC believes that with the proper training, alternative skills and assistive technology that are provided through a specialized program for persons with visual disabilities, individuals who are blind can be vocationally, socially and economically competitive.